

Legislation Benefits Latino and Minority Communities

May 14, 2008

Media Contact: Rebecca Dreilinger (202) 225-8203

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) today backed a bipartisan Farm Bill that will strengthen American agriculture, help families facing high food costs and benefit minority agricultural workers in particular. Officially titled the Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act, the legislation passed by a vote of 318 to 106.

“The new farm bill will help families who see food costs rising while supporting our farmers and taking important steps toward reforming farm payments,” said Gutierrez. “The bill will also help Latino families in particular by dramatically increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables in low-income schools; providing over \$1 billion in new funding for fresh fruits and vegetables, which helps Latino farmers, who tend to be specialty crop farmers; and increasing focus on the vulnerable farm worker population by creating pesticide-related research provisions.”

Nearly three-fourths of the Farm Bill will support nutrition programs that help 38 million American families afford healthy food. The legislation’s updates to the food stamp provisions will help about 11 million people by 2012. The bill also provides much-needed support to emergency feeding organizations, such as food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens by

increasing TEFAP funding by \$1.25 billion – with \$50 million for immediate shortages at food pantries. Additionally, the bill helps schools provide healthy snacks to students, with \$1 billion for free fresh fruits and vegetables.

Struggling farmers will also receive much needed aid from the legislation. The Farm Bill reforms disaster assistance to make it a permanent, paid for program for farmers with crops stricken by natural disasters such as drought and flood.

For consumers, the bill mandates food-labeling of our meat and produce, a critical measure which had previously been stalled by six years of Republican delays.

To encourage conservation efforts, the Farm Bill boosts conservation programs that reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water and air quality, increase wildlife habitat and reduce damage caused by floods and other natural disasters by \$7.9 million.

Under the bill, farmers will also play a greater role in fueling our energy independence. The Farm Bill invests \$1 billion in renewable energy focusing on new technologies and new sources. It takes another critical step in transitioning biofuels beyond corn to non-food crops and sources such as switchgrass, woodchips and corn stalks.

Finally, the legislation also begins to end payments to farmers who don't need the help, with the most significant reforms in over 30 years. The Farm Bill reduces direct farm payments by \$300 million and cuts federal payments to crop insurance companies that are making windfall profits due to higher crop prices by \$5.7 billion.

“America's farmers feed our nation and the world, and this bill recognizes their great contribution,” added Gutierrez. “These kinds of important reforms go a long way towards improving the health of our farmers, our families, our environment, and our economy.”

###